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CIA recruiting grad students by direct mail

By KENNETH PINS

Of The Register's Ames Bureau

AMES, IA — The Central Intelligence Agency, with worldwide clandestine operations, has entered the world of direct-mail recruiting.

In letters that began going out to graduate students across the country in February, CIA personnel director Robert Magee promotes the agency as "a unique career."

"Your rewards will be unique," the letters state. "Superb education and training, assignments that call on the deepest resources of your intelligence, knowledge and responsibility, [and] the opportunity to make truly meaningful contributions, for your benefit and the nation's."

The recruiting letters, which come with a resume form, a general description of career opportunities and a return-addressed envelope, are part of a new era in CIA recruitment that has been coming in from the cold.

"It's an innovation," said Larry Curran, director of the recruitment operations division at the CIA's McLean, Va., headquarters.

Curran said the CIA "bought a list" of graduate students from one of the same firms that sells targeted address lists to advertisers and credit card companies trying to reach a specified audience.

The agency has received some responses to the personalized letters, but Curran said it's too soon to tell how effective the direct-mail approach will be. "Frankly, the list is not as clean as we would like it to be," he said, making it harder to pinpoint graduate students in disciplines from which the CIA draws recruits.

"We're just trying to expand the

pool" of applicants, Curran said. "Our selectivity is so high we have to keep feeding [the pipeline]. It's a never-ending drive to get good people."

Curran said a five-year effort to produce candidates for CIA employment through general advertising has been "very effective."

"We're being more open about our recruitment," said Gerald Beechum, CIA recruiter for a five-state Midwestern region that includes Iowa. The agency has adopted an approach not unlike corporate recruiters — announcing campus visits in newspaper advertisements, scheduling appointments with students in on-campus placement offices, sponsoring a twice-annual exam and discussing some CIA employment opportunities.

"I don't think you'd find that with intelligence agencies in other countries," Beechum said.

Starting Salaries

The starting CIA salary for a new graduate with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering is \$23,800. For a new graduate with a liberal arts bachelor's degree, the starting salary is \$17,800.

The movement toward more openness is intended to clear up "misperceptions" about the agency, Beechum said. It is a dramatic departure from earlier times when CIA recruiters "let the word filter down through a variety of means," including on-campus contacts, that they were coming to town looking for candidates, he said.

The more public recruiting effort also may be necessary to fill what are believed to be a larger number of authorized CIA openings. Beechum said the agency never discusses the number of people it interviews or hires, but President Reagan has stated his intention to rebuild America's intelligence gathering capability, which he said was "dismantled" during the Carter years.

The changing recruitment approach has not quelled all protest, however. When Beechum came to the Iowa State University campus to recruit last fall, members of the Ames Peace Network passed out leaflets and phoned some of the students who had scheduled interviews and tried to dissuade them from exploring a career with the CIA.

The leaflets stated that the CIA "has

a history of intervention, subversion and assassinations," including recent efforts to undermine the government of Nicaragua, and they claimed "the CIA represents the dark side of the history of the United States. A career in the CIA is not a career for which you or your children will be proud."

Some Success from Leaflets

James Dubert, a member of the Ames Peace Network, said those efforts were successful in preventing one student from taking the CIA exam, but most were unmoved.

"A lot of them were aware of what the CIA did and agreed with it," Dubert said. "A few of them were very vocal against us and tore up our literature right in our faces."

Students who plan to apply must be prepared to open their lives for inspection, and a note at the top of the resume form says the agency is required to report any violations of federal law.

The form then asks if applicants have ever used drugs, and if they have, to "state the form(s) of the drugs taken, how administered, dates and places, to what extent and under what circumstances."

The resume also asks, "Are there any incidents in your life (not mentioned previously) which you desire to explain? If so, describe incident(s) and provide date(s) of occurrence(s) on separate sheet. ..."

Says Beechum: "We try to be fairly straightforward with the applicants," even discouraging some from pursuing CIA work.

It appears the agency wants that openness to be a two-way street.

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